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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2020  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: PRT KARBALA: ANTI-BA'ATH SENTIMENT  
RUNS HIGH AS ELECTION SEASON KICKS OFF

REF: A. BAGHDAD 0365  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 0338

Classified By: Classified by PRT Karbala Team Leader John Kincannon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. This is a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Karbala report.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Karbala Governor Amal al-Din al-Hir (State of Law) told PRToffs on February 11 that the United States had suffered a "loss of prestige" from its perceived efforts to "return Ba'athists to power" and warned of increased resentment against the United States. The Governor claimed there are two thousand Ba'athists working and living in Karbala after post-Saddam de-Ba'athification efforts. While he stated that those Ba'athists had never faced repercussions, he cited no tolerance for Ba'athists with "blood on their hands." On February 11, Karbala's Provincial Council formed a provincial Accountability and Justice Committee (PAJC) "to keep Ba'athists away from the governmental departments." Anti-Ba'athist sentiment continues to grow in Karbala, with local incumbents having discovered a convenient political hot button issue to divert political attention from the issue of public service delivery. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Karbala's Governor Amal al-Din al-Hir (State of Law) told PRToffs on February 11 that the United States had suffered a loss of prestige in southern Iraq from its perceived efforts to "restore Ba'athists to power." He warned PRToffs of increased resentment against the U.S. following Arba'in attacks in Karbala by alleged Ba'athist elements, which combined with continued media reports of U.S. "interference" in the AJC controversy could result in blame of the U.S. for pre-election violence (refs A-B). PRT Team Leader restated the United States' opposition to the Ba'ath party and support for the independence and integrity of Iraq's political and judicial institutions, and asked the governor to help clarify USG policy on the matter. Amal did not appear to be interested in doing so, focusing instead on what he characterized as Ba'athist crimes.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) The Governor asserted that there are two thousand Ba'athists still working and living in Karbala even after post-Saddam de-Ba'athification efforts. He stated that nearly 99 percent of ISF officers in Karbala served the former regime, but Karbalans accept them because the officers want to serve their country. However, he cited no tolerance for Ba'athists with "blood on their hands," and complained that Ba'athists still have the money, assets and support of Gulf countries ) all the basis for their previous power, querying "How can Shi'a compete with that?"

[1](#)5. (U) A PRT local employee reported on February 10 that Karbala's PC was planning to initiate a de-Ba'athification

process within local government using the PC Committee on Anti-Corruption, chaired by PM Maliki's cousin, Ali Mohammad Sharif al-Maliki. Media reports indicated that Deputy PC Chairman Nassif Jassim Mohammad al-Khotabi (State of Law) said February 11 that "The provincial committee will study all Ba'athist files to keep them away from the governmental departments," and attributed responsibility for the Arba'in attacks to unnamed Ba'athists.

¶6. (C/NF) COMMENT: In PRT's February 11 meeting with the Governor, he signaled a "live and let live" note on former Ba'athists in the province despite his hardline support for the actions of the AJC in Baghdad. He may have been disingenuous or he may not be on the same page as his political coalition partners Khotabi and Mohammad Hamid Qpolitical coalition partners Khotabi and Mohammad Hamid al-Musawi (Sadrist Trend). Musawi, in particular, enjoys a reputation from his earliest days in office seeking to dismiss competent provincial technocrats and replacing them with unqualified members of his extended clan. Certainly, one attraction of the Ba'athist issue is that it allows local political incumbents to focus political dialogue on the issue of preventing the return of the hated "Ba'athists" and away from the issue of public service delivery, on which they are politically vulnerable. It remains to be seen whether this is just merely heated rhetoric or whether this will devolve into a provincial witch hunt. End comment.  
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